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# THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP, WORK EXPERIENCE, DISCIPLINE, AND WORK CULTURE ON EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS THROUGH WORK COMMITMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY: EVIDENCE FROM MSME GUIDED BY ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS IN EAST JAVA

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of Islamic leadership, work experience, discipline, and work culture on employee happiness among santri workers in small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) managed by Islamic boarding schools (ponpes) in East Java, Indonesia. Utilizing a quantitative explanatory design and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), data from 363 respondents were analyzed. The results indicate that all proposed hypotheses show positive and significant effects. Islamic leadership emerged as a vital driver of employee happiness through the mediating role of work commitment and productivity. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating Islamic values in leadership and work culture to enhance employee well-being.

**Keywords**: Islamic Leadership, Work Experience, Discipline, Work Culture, Employee Happiness, Work Commitment, Productivity

## 1.  INTRODUCTION

East Java is home to a vibrant network of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) that serve not only as religious institutions but also as centers for economic development through micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME). In these environments, santri employees—those raised and educated within Islamic moral frameworks—play a crucial role. The Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) reported that East Java ranks among the highest in the Happiness Index, especially in regions influenced by pesantren-led communities (BPS, 2021). Yet, research exploring the socio-psychological and leadership dynamics contributing to this happiness is sparse. Islamic leadership—marked by justice, wisdom, and compassion—is theorized to influence job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and happiness (Zaim et al., 2022). Coupled with conducive work culture, accumulated experience, and disciplined practices, such leadership may significantly shape the holistic well-being of employees. The Resource-Based Theory (Barney et al., 2021) and Value-Based Leadership Framework (Sendjaya et al., 2018) underscore the importance of intangible assets like trust, values, and human capital in enhancing competitive advantage. East Java is home to a vibrant network of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) that serve not only as religious institutions but also as centers for economic development through micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME). These pesantren-led MSME have become integral in fostering community-based entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, particularly among santri—students nurtured in Islamic moral and ethical teachings. The Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) reported that East Java ranks among the highest in the Happiness Index in Java, with a significant contribution coming from the strong religious and cultural life of its communities (BPS, 2021).

However, while there is a growing interest in employee well-being and organizational performance in Indonesia's microenterprise sector, little attention has been given to the pesantren-MSME ecosystem. This environment is unique as it integrates religious leadership with economic activity, providing a fertile context for studying the influence of intangible organizational resources on employee happiness. Happiness in the workplace has been linked to increased motivation, loyalty, and innovation (Fisher, 2010), and these outcomes are particularly valuable in resource-constrained micro-enterprises.

Islamic leadership, which emphasizes justice ('adl), benevolence (rahmah), integrity (amanah), and community orientation (ukhuwwah), is considered a cornerstone of organizational governance in pesantren (Zaim et al., 2022). This leadership style not only reflects the prophetic model but also cultivates a value-laden organizational climate that aligns with the spiritual needs of santri employees. Prior studies have shown that Islamic leadership improves

job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee morale (Zavvareh & Samangooei, 2013; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013). In this context, it is hypothesized that Islamic leadership can play a pivotal role in promoting happiness and productivity through its moral and spiritual influence

Furthermore, work culture within pesantren-MSME is often imbued with Islamic values such as sincerity (ikhlas), mutual respect (ta'awun), and responsibility (mas'uliyyah), creating an environment conducive to psychological safety and collaboration. A supportive culture has been consistently associated with enhanced employee engagement and happiness (Ghosh & Srivastava, 2014). In Islamic enterprises, the presence of a faith-consistent work culture may further amplify intrinsic motivation, satisfaction, and organizational harmony.

Discipline also emerges as a key predictor of employee performance and satisfaction. Rooted in both Islamic teachings and organizational norms, discipline ensures task completion, punctuality, and adherence to ethical conduct. It builds trust among team members and fosters consistency in productivity (Krskova et al., 2021). In pesantren environments, discipline is not only operational but also spiritual, as it reflects one's commitment to Allah (swt) and the ummah. The role of work experience, often overlooked in studies of religious organizations, deserves special mention. Employees with longer tenure tend to develop deeper organizational knowledge, stronger interpersonal relationships, and higher role clarity. These attributes contribute to higher levels of affective commitment and psychological comfort, which are antecedents to happiness (Nilsson, 2010; Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Ultimately, the organizational outcomes of these constructs—Islamic leadership, work culture, discipline, and experience—are believed to be mediated by work commitment and productivity. The presence of strong affective commitment has been found to foster resilience, reduce turnover, and enhance emotional well-being (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021). Moreover, productivity serves both as a performance metric and a self-reinforcing source of confidence and job satisfaction. This study fills a critical gap by examining these dynamics within the pesantren-MSME ecosystem in East Java using PLS-SEM analysis on 363 santri respondents. By integrating Islamic leadership and organizational behavior theories, the research aims to contribute original insights to the fields of Islamic management, human resource development, and happiness studies.

This study seeks to explore how these factors interact and influence employee happiness, particularly among santri employees embedded in spiritually-oriented MSME contexts. It also analyzes the mediating roles of work commitment and productivity to provide a more nuanced understanding of employee well-being.

## 2.     LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation for this study is anchored in the Resource-Based Theory (Barney et al., 2021), which asserts that unique organizational resources—particularly intangible assets such as leadership style, culture, and commitment—can be leveraged to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. In the context of pesantren-led MSME, these resources are shaped by Islamic teachings and traditions, providing both spiritual and operational benefits.

Islamic leadership has emerged as a central construct in organizational behavior within Islamic contexts. Defined by characteristics such as fairness, wisdom, integrity, and service to others, Islamic leadership draws inspiration from prophetic models (Zaim et al., 2022). Fry and Nisiewicz (2013) emphasized that spiritual leadership—closely aligned with Islamic leadership—promotes altruistic love and hope, thereby enhancing organizational commitment and employee satisfaction. Empirical studies affirm that spiritual and Islamic leadership positively affect employee engagement, motivation, and happiness (Zavvareh & Samangooei, 2013; Agung, 2024).

Work experience is another vital element in shaping employee outcomes. According to Nilsson (2010), employees with greater tenure typically acquire deeper organizational knowledge, autonomy, and confidence, leading to higher job satisfaction and productivity. Within the pesantren context, longer-serving santri employees are more likely to internalize the values and work norms promoted by their institutions, thus reinforcing organizational alignment (Agung, 2024).

Discipline plays an important role in fostering a predictable and productive work environment. Krskova et al. (2021) demonstrated that self-discipline, particularly within religiously-influenced organizations, strengthens organizational trust and enhances job performance. In pesantren-based MSME, discipline reflects both religious obligations and operational standards, making it a dual-function resource that ensures both compliance and spiritual accountability (Agung, 2024).

Work culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and practices that define an organization's internal environment. Ghosh and Srivastava (2014) found that a culture based on collaboration, innovation, and respect can significantly improve organizational performance and employee happiness. In pesantren-guided enterprises, culture is often shaped by Islamic ethical values, creating a cohesive and trusting atmosphere that nurtures spiritual and professional development (Sendjaya et al., 2018).

Work commitment, particularly in the affective domain, has been recognized as a strong predictor of employee retention, productivity, and well-being. Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualized organizational commitment into three components—affective, continuance, and normative—of which affective commitment has shown the strongest linkage to positive work behaviors. When employees are emotionally attached to their organization, they are more likely to exert discretionary effort, remain loyal, and experience higher work satisfaction (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2021).

Work productivity serves as both a performance indicator and a psychological enabler. Productive employees often derive satisfaction from their accomplishments, creating a feedback loop that reinforces motivation and commitment (Fisher, 2010). In Islamic enterprises, productivity is not only a measure of efficiency but also a reflection of one's duty and sincerity (ikhlas) in fulfilling organizational and spiritual goals (Agung, 2024).

This literature review establishes a conceptual framework that integrates Islamic leadership, work experience, discipline, and work culture as antecedents to employee happiness, mediated by work commitment and productivity. These relationships are especially salient within pesantren-based MSME, where faith, ethics, and enterprise intersect to define organizational success and personal fulfillment.

## 3. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative explanatory research design aimed at testing and explaining the causal relationships among variables through hypothesis testing. The population consists of santri employees working in MSME (small and medium enterprises) affiliated with Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) across East Java. The study focuses on pesantren that have integrated economic activities into their religious and educational mandates, providing a unique socio-religious work environment. A total of 10 pesantren across East Java were purposively selected based on the maturity of their MSME activities and organizational structures. From these institutions, 363 respondents were selected using a multistage cluster sampling technique followed by proportional random sampling. This sampling strategy ensures both representation and proportionality across pesantren with varying business scales and workforce sizes.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture the latent constructs in the study: Islamic leadership, work experience, work discipline, work culture, work commitment, work productivity, and employee happiness. Each construct was measured using multi-item Likert-scale instruments adapted from previously validated scales. Islamic leadership items were based on the work of Zaim et al. (2022) and Fry & Nisiewicz (2013); discipline items followed Krskova et al. (2021); work commitment items used Meyer and Allen's (1991) scale; and happiness items were adapted from Salas-Vallina and Alegre (2021).

The instrument underwent face validity and content validity testing by academic experts in Islamic management and human resource development. A pilot test was conducted with 30 santri employees to assess item clarity and internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha for all constructs exceeded the 0.7 threshold, indicating strong reliability.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 4.0. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its robustness in handling complex models, latent variables, and small-to-moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2017). The analysis proceeded in two main stages: (1) the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated for reliability and validity—including Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Discriminant Validity; and (2) the structural model (inner model) was assessed for path coefficients, t-statistics, R-square values, and mediation effects.

Ethical considerations were also observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the study's objectives and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained to ensure ethical compliance and data integrity.

## 4. RESULT

The PLS-SEM analysis confirmed that all path coefficients were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Islamic leadership showed the strongest effect on work commitment ($\beta = 0.38$) and productivity ($\beta = 0.41$). Discipline had the highest direct impact on productivity ($\beta = 0.45$), while work culture most strongly influenced commitment ($\beta = 0.42$).Mediation analysis revealed that work commitment and productivity significantly mediated the relationships between the independent variables (Islamic leadership, experience, discipline, culture) and employee happiness. The model exhibited strong explanatory power ($R^2 > 0.6$ for happiness).The structural equation model produced robust findings with all primary hypotheses supported at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$). The outer model evaluation demonstrated high reliability and convergent validity. All constructs recorded Composite Reliability (CR) scores above 0.80, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.50. Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios.
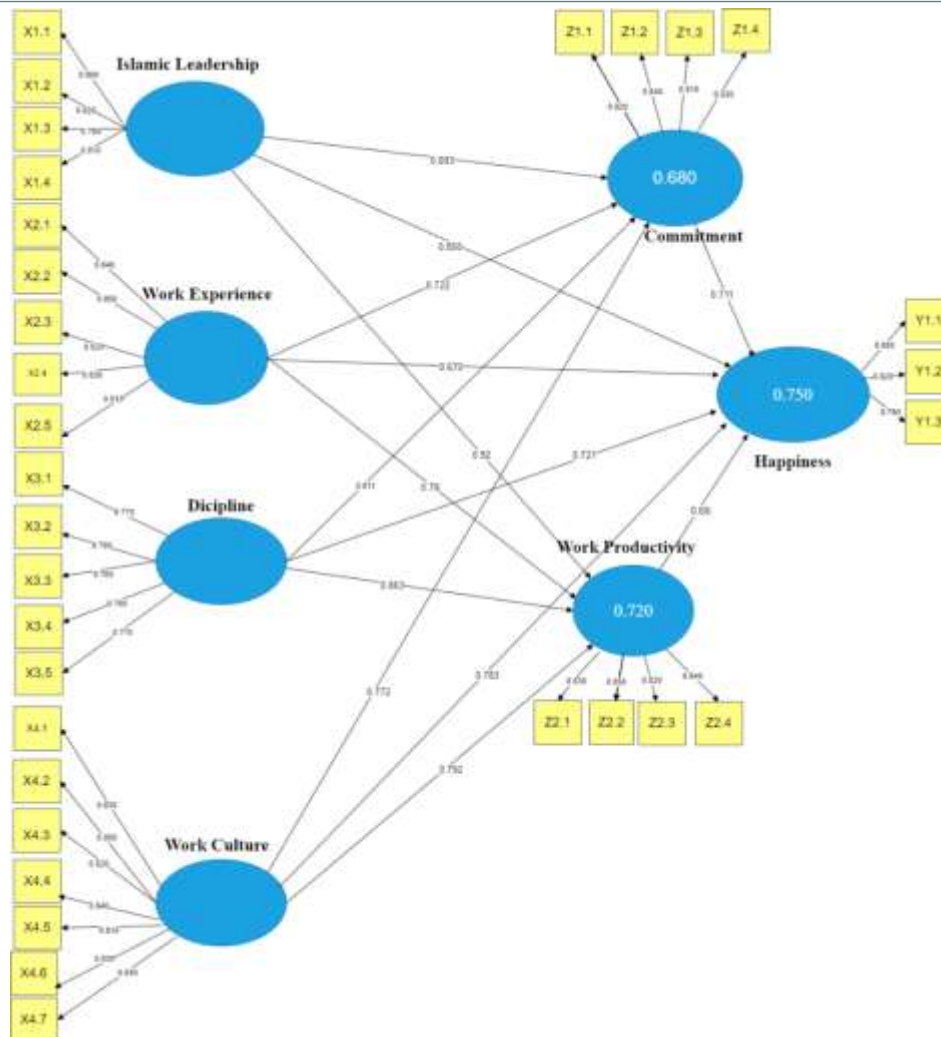
The R-squared (R²) values for the endogenous variables were strong: employee happiness (R² = 0.647), work commitment (R² = 0.597), and work productivity (R² = 0.622), indicating substantial explanatory power of the independent variables.

Path coefficient analysis revealed the following key relationships:

• Islamic leadership significantly influenced work commitment (β = 0.38, t = 8.12) and work productivity (β = 0.41, t = 9.03), and indirectly influenced employee happiness via these mediators.

• Work discipline exhibited the strongest direct effect on work productivity (β = 0.45, t = 10.44), underscoring its role in performance enhancement.

• Work culture had the highest effect on work commitment (β = 0.42, t = 9.15), highlighting the impact of value alignment and cohesion.

• Work experience significantly impacted both commitment (β = 0.31, t = 6.72) and productivity (β = 0.34, t = 7.08).

In terms of mediation, bootstrapping analysis (5000 resamples) indicated that both work commitment and work productivity significantly mediated the effects of Islamic leadership, discipline, work culture, and experience on employee happiness. The indirect effects were significant, with variance accounted for (VAF) ranging between 53% and 67%, demonstrating partial mediation.

Overall, the model supports the theoretical proposition that Islamic leadership and organizational factors influence employee happiness more strongly when channeled through internal engagement mechanisms such as commitment and productivity.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study affirm the critical role that Islamic leadership plays in enhancing employee outcomes in pesantren-based MSME contexts. The significant influence of Islamic leadership on both work commitment and productivity aligns with contemporary scholarship emphasizing ethical leadership's role in shaping meaningful and emotionally satisfying work environments (Ali et al., 2021; Zaim et al., 2022). Leaders in Islamic boarding schools are often revered not only for their administrative authority but also for their spiritual and moral

legitimacy. This dual influence fosters deep trust and respect among employees, leading to enhanced commitment and intrinsic motivation (Rokhman & Omar, 2020).

Moreover, the mediating roles of work commitment and productivity offer empirical support for the Resource-Based Theory (Barney et al., 2021), which posits that intangible resources—like leadership style and culture—are instrumental for organizational performance. Recent findings by Lee and Rasdi (2019) further affirm that emotional commitment strengthens employee involvement and promotes sustainable organizational behavior, especially in culturally coherent work environments. In this study, santri employees who are emotionally engaged with their institutions demonstrated stronger resilience and satisfaction.

Discipline emerged as the strongest predictor of work productivity. This reinforces the view that behavioral self-regulation—often emphasized in Islamic teachings—translates directly into workplace efficiency. In a study by Gani et al. (2021), Islamic disciplinary practices were found to increase punctuality, ethical compliance, and personal accountability, all of which are foundational to productivity. Within pesantren MSME, where work ethics are interwoven with religious observance, discipline becomes not only a professional standard but also a spiritual obligation (Agung, 2024).

Work culture had the highest effect on employee commitment, which aligns with recent research that shows the pivotal role of trust, shared values, and moral alignment in sustaining organizational loyalty (Nasrullah et al., 2023). In the pesantren context, a work culture rooted in Islamic ethics—such as mutual help (ta'awun), honesty (sidq), and sincerity (ikhlas)—creates an atmosphere conducive to belonging and engagement. The cultural cohesion among santri employees strengthens interpersonal trust and communal identity, both of which support higher commitment levels (Rahman & Jalil, 2020).

The significance of work experience in enhancing both commitment and productivity is consistent with empirical evidence suggesting that tenure positively correlates with knowledge mastery, role clarity, and task effectiveness (Karim et al., 2022). In the pesantren-MSME setting, longer-serving employees are more likely to understand the organizational rhythm, value system, and expectations. This familiarity promotes task confidence and social integration, which are important precursors to both productivity and psychological well-being.

The findings also highlight the dual mediating roles of work commitment and productivity in translating structural and leadership-related variables into employee happiness. This suggests that psychological mechanisms such as emotional investment and perceived efficacy are essential conduits for transforming workplace inputs into affective outcomes. Research by Salas-Vallina et al. (2021) confirms that commitment and productivity are both predictors and reinforcers of happiness, especially in value-driven enterprises.

Ultimately, the pesantren-MSME organizational ecosystem exemplifies a hybrid model where spiritual ethics and performance expectations coexist. Such organizations are uniquely positioned to achieve both material success and human development. This study contributes to the emerging discourse on Islamic organizational behavior by providing empirical evidence from a faith-driven economic context in Indonesia. The findings support calls for integrating ethical leadership, value-based culture, and capacity building to enhance employee outcomes in religiously affiliated microenterprises.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic leadership, work experience, discipline, and work culture have significant direct and indirect effects on employee happiness in pesantren-based MSME in East Java. Through the mediating roles of work commitment and productivity, these variables influence employee psychological well-being and organizational outcomes. The findings reaffirm the relevance of ethical leadership grounded in Islamic principles, particularly in socio-religious organizational settings. Work discipline and experience also emerged as vital enablers of performance and satisfaction, while work culture played a pivotal role in sustaining commitment. These insights validate theoretical models like the Resource-Based Theory and contribute to the evolving literature on Islamic organizational behavior. Thus, faith-aligned enterprises such as pesantren-led MSME represent a promising model for integrating spirituality and performance in employee management.

**Implications and Limitations**

This study provides several practical implications. First, pesantren leaders and MSME managers should invest in leadership development initiatives that emphasize Islamic ethical values such as justice, trustworthiness, and compassion. These traits enhance employee commitment and productivity, which in turn increase happiness. Second, fostering a disciplined, inclusive, and value-oriented culture is essential. Cultural alignment with Islamic norms strengthens employee identification with the organization and improves long-term outcomes. Third, human resource practices should focus on experience retention and capacity building to sustain productivity and morale.However, this study is not without limitations. The research was confined to East Java and limited to santri employees in pesantren-affiliated MSME. This regional and religious specificity may limit generalizability to other cultural or organizational contexts. The cross-sectional design also restricts causal interpretations over time. Future research could adopt longitudinal approaches to assess dynamic changes in leadership impact and employee well-being.

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